The Greek State, 1871

Preface

We moderns have an advantage over the Greeks with two concepts, which are given as a consolation as it were to a world behaving thoroughly slavishly and yet at the same time anxiously eschewing the word 'slave': we speak of the 'dignity of man' and of the 'dignity of work'. Everything is at pains to miserably perpetuate a miserable existence; this awful need compels man to exhausting work; he – or more correctly the human intellect – seduced by the 'will', now occasionally marvels at work as something dignified. However, in order that work might have a claim on titles of honour, it would be necessary above all that existence itself, to which work after all is only a painful means, should have more dignity and value than it appears to have had up to the present, to serious-minded philosophies and religions. What else may we find in the toil of all the millions but the drive to exist at any price, the same all-powerful drive by which stunted plants stretch their roots into arid rocks!

Out of this awful struggle for existence only those individuals can emerge who are, at once, again occupied with the noble illusions of artistic culture, lest they should arrive at practical pessimism which nature abhors as truly unnatural. In the modern world which, compared with the Greek, usually creates only freaks and centaurs, in which the individual, like that fabulous creature in the beginning of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, is a colourful patchwork,

the craving of the struggle for existence and of the need for art arise often at the same time in the same man: out of this unnatural amalgamation has originated the need to excuse and to consecrate that first craving before this need for art. Therefore we believe in the 'dignity of man' and the 'dignity of work'.

The Greeks did not require such conceptual hallucinations, for among them the idea that work is a disgrace is expressed with startling frankness; and another piece of wisdom, more hidden and rarely expressed, but everywhere alive, added that the human thing also was a disgraceful and pathetic nothing, and the 'dream of a shadow'. Work is a disgrace because existence has no value in itself; but even if this very existence shines forth in the alluring embellishment of artistic illusions and really seems to have a value in itself, then that pronouncement is still valid that work is a disgrace indeed, as it is impossible for man, fighting for sheer survival, to be an *artist*. In modern times it is not the man in need of art but the slave who determines general views, the slave who according to his nature must give deceptive names to all the circumstances of his life in order to be able to live. Such phantoms as the dignity of man, the dignity of work, are the needy products of a slavery that hides from itself. Woeful time, in which the slave requires such conceptions, in which he is incited to think about and beyond himself! Cursed seducers, who have destroyed the slave's state of innocence by the fruit of the tree of knowledge! Now the slave must scrape through from one day to the next with such sheer lies recognisable to anyone with deeper insight, such as the alleged 'equal rights of all' or the so-called 'fundamental rights of man', of man as such, or such as the 'dignity of work'. Indeed he is not to understand at what stage and at what height one can start talking about 'dignity', namely, at the point, where the individual completely transcends himself and no longer has to produce and to work in order to preserve his individual existence.

And even upon this height of 'work' the Greek at times is overcome by a feeling that resembles shame. Plutarch, with ancient Greek instinct, once said that no youth of noble birth, on beholding the Zeus in Pisa, would have the desire to become himself a Phidias, or on seeing the Hera in Argos, to become himself a Polyklet; and just as little would he wish to be Anacreon, Philetas or Archilochus, however much he might revel in their poetry. To the Greek artistic creativity falls just as much under the undignified conception of work as any ignoble craft. But if the compelling force of the artistic impulse operates in him, then he *must* create and submit himself to that hardship of work. And as a father admires the beauty and the gift of his child but thinks of the act of procreation with embarrassed reluctance, so it was with the Greek. The joyful astonishment at the beautiful has not blinded him as to its origin which appeared to him, like all becoming in nature, to be a tremendous hardship, a forcing of itself into existence. That feeling by which the process of procreation is considered as something shameful, to

be hidden, although by it man serves a higher purpose than his individual preservation, the same feeling veiled also the origin of the great works of art, in spite of the fact that through them a higher form of existence is inaugurated, just as through that other act comes a new generation. *Shame* seems therefore to occur where man is merely a tool of infinitely greater manifestations of will than he is permitted to consider himself to be in the isolated shape of the individual.

Now we have the general concept with which to categorise the feelings which the Greeks had with regard to work and slavery. Both were considered by them as a necessary disgrace, of which one feels *ashamed*, both as a disgrace and as a necessity. In this feeling of shame is hidden the unconscious realisation that the real aim *needs* those conditions, but that in that *need* lies the fearful and beast-of-prey-like quality of this Sphinx which is nature, which in the glorification of the artistically free life of culture so beautifully stretches forth her virginal body. Culture, which is chiefly a real need for art, rests upon a terrible basis: the latter however makes itself known in the sensation of a shame, which dawns upon one. In order that there may be a broad, deep and fertile soil for the development of art, the overwhelming majority must, in the service of a minority, be slavishly subjected to life's struggle, thus *exceeding* what their own wants necessitate. At their cost, through their extra work, that privileged class is to be relieved from the struggle for existence, in order to create and to satisfy a new world of want.

Accordingly we must accept this cruel-sounding truth that *slavery belongs to the essence of a culture*; a truth of course, which leaves no doubt as to the absolute value of existence. *This truth* is the vulture that gnaws at the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture. The misery of toiling men must still increase in order to make the production of the world of art possible to a small number of Olympian men. Here is to be found the source of that secret wrath nourished at all times by Communists and Socialists, and also by their paler descendants, the white race of 'Liberals', not only against the arts, but also against classical antiquity. If culture really was left to the discretion of a people, if here inexorable powers did not rule, powers which are law and restraint to the individual, then the contempt for culture, the glorification of a poorness in spirit, the iconoclastic annihilation of artistic claims would be *more* than an insurrection of the oppressed masses against drone-like individuals: it would be the cry of pity tearing down the walls of culture; the desire for justice, for equal suffering, would swamp all other ideas. In fact, an exuberant degree of pity has once for a short time opened, here and there, all the flood gates of culture-life; a rainbow of pitying love and of peace appeared with the first radiant rise of Christianity and beneath it was born Christianity's most beautiful fruit, the Gospel of St John. But there are also instances to show that powerful religions for long periods petrify a given degree of culture, and cut off with inexorable sickle everything that still wants to grow strongly and luxuriantly. For it is not to be forgotten

that the same cruelty, which we found in the essence of every culture, lies also in the essence of every powerful religion and in general in the nature of *power*, which is always evil; so that we shall understand it just as well, when a culture breaks down a too highly piled bulwark of religious claims with a cry for liberty, or at least justice. That which in this sorry scheme of things wants to live, that is, must live, is at the bottom of its nature the image of the primal-pain and primal-contradiction, and must therefore strike our eyes – 'organs made for this world and earth' – as an insatiable craving for existence and as an eternal self-contradiction, within the form of time, therefore as *becoming*. Every moment devours the preceding one, every birth is the death of innumerable beings; procreation, living, murdering, are one. Therefore we may compare this grand culture with a blood-stained victor, who in his triumphal procession drags along the defeated chained to his chariot as slaves, slaves whom a beneficent power has so blinded that, almost crushed by the wheels of the chariot, they nevertheless still exclaim: 'Dignity of work!' 'Dignity of man!' The voluptuous Cleopatra-culture throws ever again the most priceless pearls into her golden goblet: these pearls are the tears of pity for the misery of the slave. Out of the pampering of modern man arose the enormous social distress of the present time, not out of the true and deep compassion for that misery; and if it should be true that the Greeks perished through their slavery, then another fact is much more certain, that we shall perish through the *lack* of slavery. Slavery did not appear in any way objectionable, much less abominable, either to early Christianity or to the Germanic tribes. What an uplifting effect on us has the contemplation of the medieval serf, with his inwardly strong and tender legal and ethical relationship to the man of higher rank, with the profound fencing in of his narrow existence – how elevating! – and how reproachful!

He who cannot reflect upon the position of affairs in society without melancholy, who has learnt to conceive of it as the continual painful birth of those who are set apart, the men of culture, in whose service everything else must be sacrificed, will no longer be deceived by that false glamour, which the moderns have spread over the origin and meaning of the state. For what can the state mean to us, if not the means by which that social-process described previously is to get underway and to be guaranteed in its unimpeded continuance? Be the sociable instinct in individual man as strong as it may, it is only the iron clamp of the state that constrains the large masses upon one another in such a fashion that a chemical separation of society, with its new pyramidal superstructure, is *bound* to take place. But what is the origin of this sudden power of the state, whose aim lies far beyond the insight and egoism of the individual? How did the slave, the blind mole of culture, *originate*? The Greeks in their instinct relating to the law of peoples have betrayed it to us, in an instinct, which even in the ripest fullness of their civilisation and humanity never ceased to utter as out of a brazen mouth such words as: 'to the victor belongs the vanquished, with

wife and child, goods and blood. Power gives the first *right*, and there is no right, which at bottom is not presumption, usurpation, violence'.

Here again we see with what pitiless inflexibility nature, in order to arrive at society, forges for herself the cruel tool of the state – namely, the *conqueror* with the iron hand, who is nothing but the objectification of the instinct indicated. By the indefinable greatness and power of such conquerors the spectator feels that they are only the means of an intention manifesting itself through them and yet hiding itself from them. The weaker forces attach themselves to them with such mysterious speed, and transform themselves so wonderfully, in the sudden swelling of that violent avalanche, under the charm of that creative kernel, into an affinity hitherto not existing, as if a supernatural will were emanating from them.

Now when we see how little the vanquished trouble themselves after a short time about the dreadful origin of the state, so that history informs us of no kind of events worse than the origins of those sudden, violent, bloody and, at least in *one* point, inexplicable usurpations: when hearts involuntarily go out towards the magic of the developing state with the presentiment of an invisibly deep intention, where the calculating intellect is enabled to see an addition of forces only; when now even the state is viewed with fervour as the goal and ultimate aim of the sacrifices and duties of the individual: then out of all that speaks the enormous necessity of the state, without which nature might not succeed in achieving, through society, her salvation in appearance, in the mirror of the genius. What discernments does the instinctive pleasure in the state not overcome! One would indeed feel inclined to think that a person who looks into the origin of the state will henceforth seek his salvation at an awful distance from it; and where can one not see the monuments of its formation, devastated lands, destroyed cities, savaged men, consuming hatred of peoples! The state, of ignominious birth, for the majority of men a continually flowing source of toil, at frequently recurring periods the consuming torch of humankind – and yet a word, at which we forget ourselves, a battle cry, which has filled men with enthusiasm for innumerable truly heroic deeds, perhaps the highest and most venerable object for the blind and egoistic mass which only in the tremendous moments of state-life has the strange expression of greatness on its face!

We have, however, to consider the Greeks, with regard to the unique zenith of their art, as the 'political men in themselves', and certainly history knows of no second instance of such an awesome release of the political passion, such an unconditional sacrifice of all other interests in the service of this state-instinct; at best one might distinguish the men of the Renaissance in Italy with a similar title for like reasons and by way of comparison. So overloaded is that passion among the Greeks that it begins ever anew to rage against itself and to sink its teeth into its own flesh. This bloody jealousy of city against city, of party against party, this murderous greed of those petty

wars, the tiger-like triumph over the corpse of the slain enemy, in short, the incessant renewal of those Trojan scenes of struggle and horror, in the spectacle of which, as a genuine Hellene, Homer stands before us absorbed with delight – what does this naïve barbarism of the Greek state indicate, and what is its excuse before the tribunal of eternal justice? The state appears before it proudly and calmly, and by the hand it leads the exquisitely blooming woman: Greek society. For this Helen, the state waged those wars – and what grey-bearded judge could here condemn? Under this mysterious connection which we here divine between state and art, political greed and artistic creation, battlefield and work of art, we understand by the state, as already remarked, only the iron clamp producing society by force; whereas without the state, in the natural *bellum omnium contra omnes* society cannot strike root at all on a larger scale and beyond the sphere of the family. Now, after states have been established almost everywhere, that bent of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* concentrates itself from time to time into a terrible gathering of war clouds between peoples and discharges itself as it were in rare but so much the more violent thunders and lightning flashes. But in consequence of the effect of that *bellum* – an effect which is turned inwards and compressed – society is given time during the intervals to germinate and turn green everywhere, as soon as warmer days come, to let the shining blossoms of genius sprout forth.

With regard to the political world of the Hellenes, I will not hide those phenomena of the present in which I believe I detect dangerous atrophies of the political sphere equally critical for art and society. If there should exist men, who as it were through birth are placed outside the popular and state instincts, who thus have to esteem the state only insofar as they conceive that it coincides with their own interest, then such men will necessarily imagine as the ultimate national aim the most undisturbed co-existence possible of great political communities, in which *they* might be permitted to pursue their own purposes without restriction. With this in mind they will promote that policy which will best allow this; whereas it is unthinkable that they, against their intentions, guided perhaps by an unconscious instinct, should sacrifice themselves to the state purpose, unthinkable because they lack that very instinct. All other citizens of the state are in the dark about what nature intends for them with her state instinct, and they follow blindly; only those who stand outside this instinct know what *they* want from the state and what the state should grant them. Therefore it is almost unavoidable that such men should gain great influence on the state because they are allowed to consider it as a *means*, whereas all the others under the sway of the unconscious intentions of the state are themselves only means for the fulfilment of the state purpose. In order now to attain, through the medium of the state, the highest furtherance of their selfish aims, it is above all necessary, that the state be wholly freed from those terrible, unpredictable outbreaks of war so that it may be used rationally;

and thereby they strive, as consciously as possible, for a condition of things in which war is an impossibility. For that purpose the thing to do is first to curtail and to weaken the specific political impulses and through the establishment of large *equipoised* state bodies and the mutual safeguarding of them to make the successful result of an aggressive war and consequently war itself the greatest improbability; as on the other hand they will endeavour to wrest the question of war and peace from the decision of individual rulers, in order to be able rather to appeal to the egoism of the masses or their representatives; for which purpose they again need slowly to dissolve the monarchic instincts of the peoples. This purpose they attain best through the most general dissemination of the liberal optimistic world view, which has its roots in the ideals of the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution, i.e. in a wholly un-Germanic, genuinely neo-Latin, shallow and unmetaphysical philosophy. I cannot help seeing in the prevailing international movements of the present day, and the simultaneous spread of universal suffrage, the effects of the *fear of war* above everything else, I cannot help seeing behind these movements those truly international, homeless, financial recluses, as the really alarmed, who, with their natural lack of the state instinct, have learned to abuse politics as a means of the stock exchange, and state and society as an apparatus for their own enrichment. The only remedy against the threatened deviation of the state tendency towards money matters from this side is war and once again war, in the emotions of which it at least becomes obvious, that the state is not founded upon the fear of the war-demon, as a protective institution for egoistic individuals, but that rather, in the love for fatherland and prince, it produces an ethical impulse, indicative of a much higher destiny. If I therefore designate as a dangerous and characteristic sign of the present political situation the application of revolutionary thoughts in the service of a selfish, stateless money-aristocracy, if at the same time I conceive of the enormous dissemination of liberal optimism as the result of modern financial affairs fallen into strange hands, and if I imagine all evils of social conditions together with the necessary decay of the arts to have either sprouted from that root or grown together with it, one will have to pardon my occasionally chanting a paean on war. Horribly clangs its silvery bow; and although it comes along like the night, war is nevertheless Apollo, the true divinity for consecrating and purifying the state. First of all, however, as is said in the beginning of the *Iliad*, he lets fly his arrow on the mules and dogs. Then he strikes the men themselves, and everywhere pyres break into flames. Be it then pronounced that war is just as much a necessity for the state as the slave is for society, and who can avoid this verdict if he honestly asks himself about the causes of the never equalled Greek artistic perfection?

He who contemplates war and its uniformed potential, the *military profession*, with respect to the hitherto described nature of the state, must arrive at the conviction, that through war and in the military profession is

placed before our eyes a type, or even perhaps the *archetype of the state*. Here we see as the most general effect of the war tendency, an immediate division and decomposition of the chaotic masses into *military castes*, out of which rises, pyramid-shaped, on an exceedingly broad base of slaves, the edifice of the 'martial society'. The unconscious purpose of the whole movement constrains every individual under its yoke, and produces also in heterogeneous natures, as it were, a chemical transformation of their qualities until they are brought into affinity with that purpose. In the higher castes one perceives already a little more of what in this internal process is basically involved, namely the creation of the *military genius* – with whom we have become acquainted as the original founder of the state. In the case of many states, as, for example, in the Lycurgian constitution of Sparta, one can distinctly perceive the imprint of that fundamental idea of the state, that of the creation of the military genius. If we now imagine the original military state in its greatest activity, at its proper 'work', and if we fix our glance upon the whole technique of war, we cannot avoid correcting our notions picked up from everywhere, of 'dignity of man' and 'dignity of work' by the question, whether the idea of dignity is applicable also to work, which has as its purpose the destruction of the 'dignified' man, as well as to the man who is entrusted with that 'dignified work', or whether in this warlike task of the state those mutually contradictory ideas do not offset one another. I should like to think the warlike man to be a *means* of the military genius and his work again only a tool in the hands of that same genius; and not to him, as absolute man and non-genius, but to him as a means of the genius – who can choose his tool's destruction as means to the martial artwork – to him is due a degree of dignity, of that dignity namely, *to have been deemed worthy of being a means of the genius*. But what is shown here in a single instance is valid in the most general sense; every human being, with his total activity, only has dignity insofar as he is a tool of the genius, consciously or unconsciously; from this we may immediately deduce the ethical conclusion, that 'man in himself', the absolute man, possesses neither dignity, nor rights, nor duties; only as a wholly determined being serving unconscious purposes can man excuse his existence.

Plato's perfect state is according to these considerations certainly something still greater than even the warm-blooded among his admirers believe, not to mention the superior smirk with which our 'historically' educated refuse such a fruit of antiquity. The proper aim of the state, the Olympian existence and ever-renewed procreation and preparation of the genius, – compared with which all other things are only tools, expedients and factors towards realisation – is here discovered with a poetic intuition and harshly described. Plato saw through the awfully devastated Herma of the contemporary state-life and perceived even then something divine in its interior. He *believed* that one might be able to take out this divine image and that the grim and barbarically distorted exterior did not belong to the essence of the

state: the whole fervour and sublimity of his political passion threw itself upon this belief, upon that desire – and in the flames of this fire he perished. That in his perfect state he did not place at the head the genius, in its most general sense, but only the genius of wisdom and of knowledge, that he altogether excluded artistic geniuses from his state, that was a rigid consequence of the Socratic judgement on art, which Plato, struggling against himself, had made his own. This more external, almost incidental gap must not prevent our recognising in the total conception of the Platonic state the wonderfully great hieroglyph of a profound *esoteric doctrine of the connection between state and genius* eternally needing to be interpreted. We have said in this preface what we believed we could fathom of this secret script.

Translated by M. Müggе with modifications – Nathalie Lachance